

Tracks of the Deep South; A DIY roadtrip- Part 7 New Orleans

New Orleans

We were sad to leave the state of Mississippi. The people here were exceptionally friendly, the food was great. But, it was time to move onto our next stage— Louisiana.

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We crossed the border whilst on route 61 as

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we headed towards Baton Rouge and beyond. Our first Louisiana stop was Oak Valley Plantation, about an hour from New Orleans. We pre booked our timed tickets a few days in advance and were unsure what to expect as we knew we were going to get our first taste of the slave trade history here. The mansion, which was built by a wealthy family in the early 1880s as their house on their sugar plantation was beautiful. It had a gorgeous Oak lined drive (Virginian Love Oaks that dated over 250 years apparently) and was perfectly symmetrical.

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We took our house tour first, Keith enjoying a traditional mint julep whilst we were on the tour and learnt lots about the family who built the house and ran the sugar plantation.

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The mansion tour highlighted a couple of the slaves who were here, it mainly focused on the lives of the rich who lived here. But after our house tour, we found there was a separate exhibition on the lives of the slaves, not only on this plantation but also in the area, which included reconstructed examples of their accommodation and such.

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It's difficult history to digest without a doubt, but we felt they had done the exhibit respectfully and we came away learning a lot.

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We also found the exhibition about how sugar was made from sugar cane interesting- its a very long drawn out process now, so can't imagine it back when machines weren't there to help!

From the Plantation we drive the hour or so to New Orleans, located our very central ho-

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tel – many people had warned us when we visited “The Big Easy” to be cautious on where we stayed as it can be dangerous still in parts. So we paid more than we would normal for a central hotel- which of course meant headaches all round when it came to parking the car. Despite our hotel advertising it had parking, it was a blooming nightmare as it was in a different location to the hotel- we couldn’t get parked to unload our luggage and we got hassled IMMEDIATELY upon arrival. I’ll be honest by the time we got into our rooms we were a bit stressed to say the least. We wouldn’t let that linger though and spruced ourselves up ready for an evening explore of New Orleans. Very close to our hotel was a brewery which had great beer and a live jazz band on between 5-7pm.

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Our first impressions of New Orleans had
soon been swept away! For a little while.....!



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We took a walk down Bourbon Street, the famous music street and instantly felt confused. Probably our own misconceptions, but we were expecting hear jazz in New Orleans. So after nearly two hours of walking up and down the main streets and been seranaded by The Proclaimers, Guns and Roses and more, our spirits were sinking lower and low-

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er. On top of this, we really struggled to find anywhere to eat- which probably didn't help our moods! There seemed to be a lack of restaurants which meant those that were there were RAM packed. In the end we opted for basic bar grub in a bar which had a very talented pianist playing requests such as 'I will walk 500 miles', multiple Beatles songs and hip hop rapping. Not his fault - he was decent, but it wasn't what we were expecting from New Orleans.

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Thankfully – on our very grumpy walk home, we heard some jazz trickling through an open door. It was on Bourbon Street and we think they must have been on a break when we did our multiple journeys up and down just an hour or so earlier. Instantly the afternoon and evening was rectified, turned around and may as well have had bells on.

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THIS was what we were expecting of New Orleans. The bar was called Maison Bourbon by the way, and we HIGHLY recommend a visit there if you're ever there.



The next day we were up early for a change! We had booked through Viator a Swamp Airboat tour. We were picked up from our hotel

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and transported about 45 minutes out of town towards the heart of Louisiana's swamp-land. We opted for a small airboat which only had 6-8 people on board.



It was SO MUCH FUN. Our guide was a hoot – although we couldn't understand much at all of his commentary as he had such a heavy

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South accent.



Best of all – we got to see numerous wild alligators in their natural habitat. Absolutely excellent.

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They are beautiful. They stay so still I'm not ashamed to say I actually asked if this next one was real as it sat sunbathing on a rock, and then jumped out of my skin when it moved back into the water.

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Our guide at one point actually waded into the water next to one in order to encourage the gator to open its mouth so we could see its teeth.

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The tour was really really great and we felt very lucky to be able to experience these creatures in the wild. The airboat ride was an experience too- they can travel up to 35 mph and every now and again lift into the air. Certainly blew the cobwebs away!

On a high by the time we got back to New Or-

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leans, and armed with research about where to catch some more traditional jazz, we decided to have an early dinner and spent some time wandering the streets of the French Quarter admiring the architecture.



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A vibrant, two-story building with a blue facade and a red balcony, identified as 'Dat Dog' by a sign. The building features a curved balcony with ornate red metalwork and a yellow door. The street scene includes parked cars, a sidewalk with benches, and utility poles under a clear blue sky.



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Despite its name the architecture is more stereotypical of Spanish design. We had a delicious lunch of Gumbo (like a fish stew) and Pho Boys – a Louisiana soft baguette filled with shrimp in Keith's case and Catfish in mine.

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We made our way down to Frenchman's street- apparently home to the more traditional Jazz music clubs and were thrilled to find some music despite it being mid afternoon.

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We enjoyed a couple of hours in The Spotted Cat club before making our way back to the hotel to change, then do the whole thing again!

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This time we found another club on Bourbon Street – right at the bottom end called Fritzel's, and here we watched two really excellent bands perform into the evening. This was a really excellent day and made up for our false start yesterday.



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A photograph of the interior of Fritzels, a jazz club. The entrance is decorated with a large sign reading "Fritzels" and a string of colorful balloons. A band is performing on a stage in the background, and patrons are seated at tables in the foreground.



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Our final day in New Orleans began with coffee and Beignets – like a very sweet and icing sugar coated doughnut – in Cafe Du Monde, which have been serving French Coffee here for over 160 years in this very market stand.

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The queue was huge but moved quickly and we really didn't care as there was a great band playing to the queue. The beignets were delicious as was the coffee. From here we explored more of the french quarter, picking up an Alfresco cocktail at 11am and stopping for another dose of live music.

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If you know where to look it turns out there IS jazz still aplenty in New Orleans. Phew.

We rode a streetcar and had an early lunch as we had booked a boat trip on a paddle steamer – the Creole Queen.

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A vibrant, three-story red brick building with teal shutters and balconies, housing a restaurant. The ground floor features large windows and doors, with a sign for "Authentic New Orleans Cuisine". A man in a white shirt stands near the entrance, and another man in a blue shirt is visible inside. A fire hydrant and a "No Left Turn" sign are on the sidewalk.



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It was fun riding on the paddle steamer – it was a big boat with a 24 foot wide paddle at the back.



We have a soft spot for paddle steamers- we actually had our wedding reception on one on the Norfolk Broads 7 years ago, so it was a bit emotional having a ride on one on the

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Mississippi itself.



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Although I've got to be honest and say the scenery in our opinion was better on the Norfolk Broads.... just saying!

The scenery here was mainly industrial – there was a nice vista of New Orleans as we departed it through. We also had an exceptional narrator.

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As well as pointing out places of interest, and historic facts- we stopped at a battlefield – the battle of New Orleans (I’ll be honest, it was at the stage of the holiday for us both that we had had information overload and we couldn’t take a single drop more in!) – our narrator did the most remarkable presentation about Hurricane Katrina.

Believe me when I say you could have heard a pin drop – his narration about the devastation this hurricane caused for New Orleans,

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his personal link to it and the timeline he presented was absolutely outstanding- not to mention highly educational for us as we are ashamed to say we had no idea about what was happening - and deeply emotional for everyone who was listening.

Following our river trip we made our way back to the hotel and got our glad rags on. We were going to the Roosevelt. Following two separate recommendations, we visited the Sazerac Bar in the Roosevelt, to try their gin fizz - which apparently they invented and also the Sazerac Cocktail, a famous New Orleans drink which again originated from the Roosevelt. Both were absolutely delicious and we really enjoyed our time propping up the 1920s wooden bar. We also tried a cou-

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ple of other drinks – Keith had another lager he hadn't tried, and I had the Louisiana gin.

We then took another walk down Frenchman's street to see some MORE jazz! before eventually getting a bit overtired and perhaps a bit over jazzed out! So we retreated for an earlyish night.

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We very much enjoyed our time in New Orleans, despite the false start. I will say though that we found New Orleans hard work. We had a great time don't get me wrong, but you HAVE to be on high alert all the time. There is a lot of seediness, and whilst we knew this, we thought it wouldn't perhaps be so centrally located. There is absolutely NO WAY that as a lone female I would wander around here day or night. In fact on one night we had a lone female ask to join us as she made her way home and felt vulnerable on her own. It wasn't just us who felt like that either - we spoke to a New Yorker who hasn't been here in 3 years and he said whereas he used to walk back to his hotel he was going to take an uber this time as it felt unsettled and he felt unsafe on his

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own. Everyone said do NOT venture past Rampart Street and don't go into Armstrong Park day OR night. Its a shame such a prominent, historical and exciting city presents itself like this really. There was a lot of drug use evident on the streets, and a lot of people trying to scam tourists too. (I know this happens all over but it just felt different here)

So with all this said, we loved New Orleans, but we were ready to move on for one last final stop on this epic adventure.

Until Next Time

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